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ABSTRACT

In the present decade, the United States has reaffirmed its commitment to the maximum development of all children. This commitment includes each of the estimated 2.5 million gifted children in the country. As part of this commitment, the Office of Education has formulated a new and broadened definition of giftedness. However, even with a broadened definition, it appears difficult to break through the stereotypical view of giftedness in order to identify children who may be gifted and disadvantaged, or who may have a cognitive style different from the styles generally used in norm referenced standardized achievement tests. The problems involved with identifying disadvantaged gifted minority children are rooted in deeply held assumptions about intelligence and giftedness. In attempting to respond to the needs of inner city gifted children, not only must the definition of giftedness be broadened, but the mainstream culture's philosophy underlying that definition must be expanded. This definition with its new philosophical foundation could prompt the creation of programs leading to a compromise between integration of minority gifted into the mainstream of logical thought and the presentation of the unique conceptual style of the minority child. (Author/GC)

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UNMINED GOLD: POTENTIALLY GIFTED CHILDREN OF THE INNER CITY

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ABSTRACT

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

The decade of the 70's has seen the United States reaffirm its commitment to the maximum development of all children, including each of its estimated 2.5 million gifted children. As a part of this commitment to nurture the potentialities of all young people the U.S. Office of Education has formulated a new and broadened definition of giftedness. This definition includes

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children who are capable of high performance in:
general intellectual ability; a specific academic area;
creative or productive thinking; leadership; psycho-
motor ability; and the visual and performing arts.
However, even with this broadened definition it appears
difficult to break through the stereotypical view of
giftedness and adequately identify children, both with-
in and without the mainstream culture, who may be gifted
and disadvantaged, or who have a cognitive style at var-
iance with the styles generally used in norming stan-
dardized achievement tests.

The authors believe that the problems involved with
identification of disadvantaged gifted minority children
are complex and rooted in some deeply held assumptions
about intelligence and giftedness. These assumptions
lie in a perceptual model of giftedness which has served
western civilization well--the rational-scientific model.
However, problems of the 70's (ecology, energy, economics,
social and political upheaval) are of such a nature that
their very complexity demands more flexible attack strategies.
These strategies are sometimes more efficiently identified
and utilized by those having cognitive traits traditionally
not valued by the mainstream culture.

The plight of gifted disadvantaged children is further complicated by the very talents that the child possesses. Their insights and acute perceptions allow them to see in bold relief the often frightening distance between their situation and the advantages of the mainstream culture.

In attempting to respond to the needs of disadvantaged inner city gifted children not only must the definition of giftedness be broadened, but the mainstream culture's perception underlying that definition must be expanded. For, there is only limited application of a new definition that is not based on a philosophical premise valuing divergent styles of conceptualization.

This definition with its new philosophical foundation, could prompt the creation of programs leading to a compromise between integration of minority gifted into the mainstream of logical thought and the presentation of the unique conceptual style of the minority child. Society is in desperate need of new insights and new directions. Some of these insights could be gained from the unused resource of the inner city minority gifted child. Programs for gifted children will not be viable until they are practical, efficient and affordable. Programmatic variables include methods of identification, intra and extra classroom programs, enrichment, acceleration, grouping and guidance.

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The decade of the 70's has seen the United States reaffirm its commitment to the maximum development of all children, including each of its estimated 2.5 million gifted children. To the authors, this commitment appears long overdue. As late as 1974 only 13 percent of gifted children were having their needs met by some type of program, leaving 87 percent of the gifted population with unmet needs (Martinson, 1974). The implications of this inattention are tremendous. According to Norman Hall:

...10 to 20 percent of the nation's gifted and talented students become high school dropouts,... a much larger percentage never attend college, and many more realize only a slightly greater degree of partial fulfillment (Hall, 1976).

Thus, the gifted, including those of the inner city, upon whom society depends for its future innovative ideas and inventions, its humanizing direction, its creative statemenship and ultimate survival are our greatest underdeveloped resource. The authors will discuss the inherent problems of identifying¹ potentially gifted lower social economic

¹Problems related to identification occur even within the framework of the new broadened definition of giftedness which is included in the appendix.

status (S.E.S.) inner-city children²; and the urgency for their identification. Also, included will be a brief discussion of programatic concerns for this special population.

Procedures used in identification of gifted lower S.E.S. children are, to a great extent, limited by the traditional definition of giftedness. The consequences of these limited procedures are a reduced number of identified gifted lower S.E.S. children. While a number of definitions of giftedness exist, perhaps the most important immediate insight is that when applied to the minority child each definition is, to a degree, culture-bound. Ideally, the gifted should be those who possess to the highest degree specific abilities most prized by their culture. Functionally, the gifted are those whose abilities are most prized by the mainstream culture. For instance, in some American Indian cultures male transvestites (not highly prized in our culture) were valued. The twentieth century has held to the traditional concept of intelligence "...commonly termed convergent intelligence" (Parkyn, 1976). It is a rational scientific model of giftedness stressing the analytic-verbal or spatio-logical cognitive traits. This type intelligence can be tested by cognitive measures of evaluation frequently known as standardized I.Q. tests.

²The authors suggest that interested readers see Mercer's study of socio-cultural factors in testing Black and Chicano children. Using the model-family criteria on which a well-known I.Q. test was normed (Anglo sample), Mercer found Black and Chicano children from same type family backgrounds exhibited the same mean I.Q. and spread of scores as in the norm group (Mercer, 1973).

An analytic framework for defining giftedness yields the following gestalts of items, or traits traditionally associated with giftedness:

1. Places in the higher ranges on standard measures of IQ (WISC Stanford-Binet)
2. Enjoys or engages frequently in reading or other academic pursuits
3. Prefers complex tasks to simple ones
4. Is highly verbal and uses words both fluently and correctly
5. Has a long attention span

These categories have been broadened recently by Federal and State agencies to include traits such as:

1. Has a keen sense of humor
2. Demonstrates superior capacity for learning
3. Is intuitive, with sensitivity of thought
4. Is highly curious, persistent, and tenacious
5. Displays unusual interest in representation regulatory devices

In addition to the cognitive abilities cited above, Guilford (1959) has included traits related to superior memory, divergent-thinking and convergent productive abilities.

Studies of gifted children have yielded further data indicating that they are somewhat stronger and more robust physically, are frequently social leaders, and are generally

more stable than the norm. Gallagher (1975) summarizes,

The deviation of the gifted subjects from the generality is in the upward direction for nearly all traits. There is no law of compensation whereby the intellectual superiority of the gifted tends to be offset by inferiorities along nonintellectual lines.

The authors have no quarrel with most of the attributes of the gifted previously listed. It is important, however, to remember that due to culture-bound perceptual restrictions use of these criteria frequently hampers accurate identification of gifted low S.E.S. children. Failure to identify giftedness within this population is complicated by the ranking of cognitive styles of an individual on three major continua.³ Standardized assessment procedures tend only to identify as gifted those children who are reflective, field independent, analytic, and have an internal locus of control.

Traditional identification procedures applied to the traits of lower S.E.S. children fail to recognize significant numbers of gifted individuals. Yet, recent studies (Mercer, 1975, Martinson, 1974) have yielded data to support the hypothesis that inner city lower S.E.S. children possess many of the traits commonly associated with giftedness. The dilemma occurs because:

³Reflective (vs) impulsive, field independence (vs) field dependence (sometimes described as field sensitivity), and external (vs) internal locus of control.

- a. The instruments used for evaluation tend to measure only a narrow range of intellectual abilities not generally as highly developed in lower S.E.S. children.
- b. The traits of field dependence, impulsivity, global processing, and external locus of control, while not precluding giftedness, are not considered by the cultural mainstream to be visible signs of true giftedness.

Once beyond the issue of cognitive styles it is possible to find traits commonly associated with both higher S.E.S. gifted and lower S.E.S. inner city children. Some are sensitivity to patterns, forms and rhythms; sensitivity to color, shape and form; social ingenuity; verbal creativity, and physical accomplishments.

The skills a child possesses are largely determined by his or her indigenous culture. But, all too frequently the skills prized by a particular subculture of society do not receive positive recognition by institutions and/or authority figures of the mainstream culture. The mainstream culture certainly does not perceive the adaptive behaviors manifested by some lower S.E.S. children as indicating giftedness, even though these adaptive behaviors may be highly survival oriented.

To clarify: The child born into a middle-upper class professional family has a great probability of becoming highly verbal and achieving at least the same level of academic proficiency as did his/her parents. This high degree of academic

proficiency is due to the child's environment, with it's heavy emphasis on verbal skills and formal education. The child born into a lower S.E.S. inner city family, if truly gifted, may well become a disenchanted social drop-out. This youngster may even become an organizer or leader of a street gang. Sensitive to the discrepancies in our mainstream cultural value system and the actual opportunities presented, the gifted lower S.E.S. youngster may decide the way to win is through exploitation.

While we might be able to excuse society-at-large for not appreciating the talents of the lower S.E.S. gifted, it is much more difficult to excuse the general apathy found among school administrators. This apathy combined with a real fear and/or resentment of bright children by many teachers compounds the problems of both identification and proper education of this unique population.

The immediate results of neglecting gifted children is readily apparent especially in the classroom where the youngster may use his/her untapped abilities negatively. Frustration leads to unacceptable behavior and possibly to dropping out of school.

Why our culture so severely discriminates against field dependence, internal locus of control, impulsivity, and global processing, especially in our educational institutions cannot be explained in simplistic terms. Historically, mainstream cultures have tended to take an insular view of deviation from the norms among subcultures. The rational-scientific mode of problem-solving served the Western World well during

the industrial revolution, and we continue the tendency to be a nation of problem solvers rather than problem-finders.⁴ We adopt a logical analytical approach to much of life preferring to build pragmatic structures rather than lyric designs. These traits, together with our abundant natural resources, have allowed us to become the most technologically sophisticated nation in the world. By screening for these traits in our educational institutions we hope to maintain our level of technological sophistication, and indeed, to progress even further.

Only in the past decade, when we find ourselves beset with problems of energy, ecology, social, political and economic upheaval has there been a rising murmur against our neglect of giftedness in children who are not identified by traditional methods.

Society has historically rejected gifted people who later have successfully contributed and then been extolled as genius. However, the fact that they could develop independently does not give us an excuse to deny the need to more thoroughly search out the gifted from every segment of our society. Once found, they must be provided educational systems specifically created to meet their unique needs.

Society can no longer afford complacency toward the problem of gifted education. We are desperately in need of not only creative problem solvers but also of creative problem finders

⁴Arlin (1975) has reported trait differences between problem solvers and problem finders.

(Arlin (1975) has suggested that problem finding is more difficult than formulating an answer to an existing problem). To be a successful problem finder requires divergent thinking along with the ability to see the global aspects of the problem. This ability to efficiently solve global problems has been associated with an impulsive cognitive style (Barstis, Ford, 1977). Perhaps there are great problem finders hidden among the impulsive, field dependent, lower S.E.S. children in our inner city schools. Perhaps it is to these children that society will look for relief from some of our technologically induced problems. If so, then we truly find among this population UNMINED GOLD.

APPENDIX

WHO ARE THE GIFTED AND TALENTED?

Definitions

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF EDUCATION

"Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. general intellectual ability
2. specific academic aptitude
3. creative or productive thinking
4. leadership ability
5. visual and performing arts
6. psychomotor ability

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